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Is it Jimmy? Jerry? George?

Now it's perfectly clear: By Ronald Reagan's own reasoning, the person most to blame for security lapses in the triple bombings of U.S. installations in Beirut (as well as the seizure of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran) has to be *Gerald R. Ford*.

President Reagan graciously did not finger Mr. Ford by name when he told some college kids in Bowling Green, Ohio, that "we're feeling the effects today of the near-destruction of our intelligence capacity before we came here (i.e., to office in 1981)." Some angry Democrats thought he was talking about poor Jimmy Carter, a misconception Mr. Reagan blames on the way the press "distorted" his remarks. So if it wasn't Mr. Carter, who was it? By simple deduction, Reagan-style, we are forced to conclude it was Jerry Ford or perhaps, just perhaps, his director of the Central Intelligence Agency. And who's that? Fellow by the name of George Bush, current veep.

As they say, let's look at the record. The CIA went through the wringer after Vietnam and Watergate, suffering cuts and indignities in the latter part of the Nixon administration and during the Ford era. From its Vietnam peak of 8,000 employees, the agency was reduced in size to 4,730 employees. One of the legacies Ford-Bush passed on was a plan to get rid of 820 more. To their later grief, the Carterites complied. But also, in their first full fiscal year, they began a rebuilding of the

CIA that has continued to this day. So it's pretty obvious Mr. Reagan was not talking just about Jimmy Carter, as the White House now confirms.

This newspaper is not about to blame Messrs. Ford and Bush for the notorious shortfall in intelligence information at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran before its seizure in 1979. Nor will we hold them or Mr. Carter culpable for the destruction in Beirut of the U.S. Embassy in April, 1983, the Marine barracks in October, 1983, or the U.S. Embassy annex this month — all through suicidal vehicle-bomb attacks. Rather, we will leave such shoddy innuendos to the president. By reaching into the past to explain his own failures, Mr. Reagan is at least no longer comparing uncompleted security arrangements to the delays a householder encounters in getting a kitchen done over.

There is mounting evidence that a bureaucratic mess is the reason why our diplomats were exposed to death and danger. This should be investigated as ruthlessly as the military establishment examined the crossed lines of command and poor judgment that led to the October tragedy at the Marine barracks. Only this time, Mr. Reagan must not blithely accept blame, exonerate his subordinates and walk away from a nasty situation. This time he should his duty by punishing those responsible and following through on a security program that will at last protect our personnel.